

[The Arizona Republic](#)

William Hermann

The Valley's second-oldest continually operating high school turns 100 this year.

During the next week, students past and present will celebrate a century of learning, friendship and civic involvement.

Phoenix Union High School was the first high school in the Valley, opening in 1895, but it closed in 1982. Mesa High started in 1903. Tempe High was established in 1907. Glendale High opened in 1911, and Chandler High in 1912.

Congressman Harry Mitchell is a Tempe High Buffalo as are home builder Ira Fulton, football coach Karl Kiefer and theater owner Dan Harkins.

During the celebratory picnics and pep assemblies, alumni will remember the early years when the school was located at the southeastern corner of University Drive and Mill Avenue.

They'll remember how teacher and principal Elmer Row gleefully snuck up on 40 years of students to catch them ditching classes.

They'll remember 1964 when the baby boomers hit high school and the exploding population required double sessions.

They'll remember the tale of the custodian who haunts the auditorium.

"Tempe High is of great significance historically, and it's no mistake or fluke that so many of our alums have been of service," Principal Mark Yslas said. "This school is about traditions, including a tradition of service that's decades-old and lives today."

Tempe High grew up with the city that surrounded it and produced many influential graduates, including scores of Tempe City Council members, legislators, judges, attorneys, doctors, educators and business leaders.

Yslas said the key has been the school's ongoing efforts to help its students feel like they are important people in an important place and to guide them in developing a sense of community obligation.

He said Tempe High students are told they have an obligation to their community.

"We talk to our students about this and point to alums like Harry Mitchell, City Council members past and present like Joe Spracale, Shana Ellis and Ben Arredondo, countless examples of

people that have gone through Tempe High, become active in the community and made it a better place," Yslas said.

Yslas said that one of the ways Tempe High creates new Joe Spracales and Harry Mitchells is by requiring all new students to sign the New Student Participation Contract in which they commit to participating in at least one extracurricular activity per year, whether that be sports, drama, art, music, student government or clubs.

Mitchell, a 1958 graduate who taught at the school for 28 years, recently visited Tempe High, and as he strolled the halls and talked to students, he discussed the ideals he absorbed there and then helped to foster.

Mitchell said that while growing up in the small town of Tempe in the 1950s, "we all had a sense of being in this thing together and taking care of one another and being responsible for each other and our town."

He said that he worked to convey a sense of civic responsibility to his students.

"I did with my students what my teachers had done with me and what I believe had been going on at Tempe High since it started - and that's instilling a sense of community responsibility," Mitchell said.

Dan O'Neill, 52, was one of Mitchell's students in 1973.

"He required us to go to City Council meetings, learn what was going on and why it was going on," O'Neill said. "What Mr. Mitchell really impressed upon us was our obligation to the greater community."

Students today say they are learning much the same thing.

James Houda, 18, is a varsity football player, baseball player and a National Honor Society member.

"There is history all around you at Tempe High, pictures of great athletes, trophies, names from the past, and you want to live up to that," Houda said.

Ashley Alcala, 16, said that being encouraged to get involved in school life has led her to participate in volleyball, softball and soccer and to join the HOPE club, an organization for aspiring medical professionals.

"Being at Tempe High, seeing the trophies from the past, hearing about people who went here, has made me want to do something that's valuable in the future," she said.

Spracale, 75, said he believes Tempe High's tradition of community responsibility has its origins in the small town that Tempe once was.

"My family came out of Buffalo, N.Y., and we moved to Tempe in 1946," he said. "Tempe was a small town where the schools were involved with the kids and, in fact, everyone in the community was involved with the kids. It was something I hadn't experienced in Buffalo: everyone taking responsibility for taking care of others."

Spracale became a teacher and was principal of Tempe's McKemy Middle School from 1972 to 1991. When he retired, Spracale served three terms on the Tempe City Council.

Dorothy Elkins graduated in 1950 when the town population was 7,864, and she said that the small-town feeling at Tempe High made for close and lasting friendships.

"We all knew each other and formed friendships with kids in our own class and the class before and behind," Elkins said. "Some of those friendships I made then exist today. My closest friends are people I went to Tempe High School with.... I like to think that same feeling exists today at Tempe High."